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# DRAMATIC SEASON OF 1915-16 REACHES HIGH TIDE OF SUCCESS

By JULIA CHANDLER.

Now is the high tide of the dramatic season reached when the wall of discontent spreads its dolorous note from Broadway to the Pacific.

The approach of Lent is the customary cue for the producer's statement that "never in the history of the theater has there been such a disastrous year."

We've gotten so used to the assertion that we've come to look for it with as much of certainty as we look for the April buds.

So it is something of a surprise to see the chronic lines of pessimism and discontent on the managerial face take an upward curve, and hear an actual admission from the producers themselves that this has been a big year.

We've known, of course, that the virus of prosperity that has showered America with a golden flood has entered the theater, but we have known also that the habit of calamity-wailing has stuck its fangs so deeply into theatrical flesh that we were not quite prepared to hear the least confiding and cheerful of the profession declare complete satisfaction in the current year.

In New York right now good plays are turning away thousands; mediocre productions are playing to capacity, and pieces that in former seasons would have been relegated to the storehouse within a week are having long runs and making money. Trade papers throughout the country are commenting on the splendid situation, and playwrights who were so discouraged last season over the failure of their work are wishing to heaven they had gotten busy this year and written something or other so that they might have come in on the crest of the luck wave.

Mr. L. Stoddard Taylor of the Belasco Theater in this city told me one evening last week that not in seven years has the playhouse under his management done such excellent business; Manager Rapley, of the National, dittoes Mr. Taylor's assertion in talking of his own theater; General Manager Thatcher, of the Poli interests, wears a smile a yard long; Mr. Fred Berger's geniality grows apace; Manager Robins beams his satisfaction over at Keith's, and everybody is happy.

With several of the metropolitan producers this great business success extends back into last year which was generally acceded one of dramatic disaster.

It was certainly true of Messrs. Cohan and Harris whose coffers overflowed from the proceeds of one production alone. I refer to "On Trial," which early in the season of 1914-15 opened the brand-new Candler Theater in New York, where lines of folk overflowed into the street daily in a patient effort to cash in their coin for the privilege of enjoying three hours of spine-tickling, hair-raising thrills.

To this crowded lobby before each

performance of his play went young Elmer L. Rizenstein. He watched the crowds with bewildered eyes, dazed over the force with which he had "arrived." Diffident, modest, he talked to few. Seldom was any one seen talking to him. And when the long line before the box office window thinned the playwright slipped quietly into the theater and watched his manner of telling a world-old story make the vast audiences lean forward and grip the seats in front, while the big human notes which throb through the tale held tense the heart strings of "the house."

It is seldom that a theatrical writer, who is inevitably surfeited with entertainment, forgets the purpose of analysis for which he, or she, is in the theater, becoming so absorbed in the story of a play, or the manner of its presentation, as to become oblivious to his, or her, professional capacity, but I confess to just such an experience as I watched the story which Mr. Rizenstein has told backward (with absolute disregard for chronology) uniquely and flawlessly presented one evening in early September, 1914.

"On Trial" deals with circumstantial evidence. A husband is fighting for his life. A juror has just been sworn and the District Attorney is stating the case. The defendant's lawyer follows, and the first witness is called. The wife of the murdered man takes the stand and begins telling of a telephone call that immediately preceded the murder of her husband.

"The telephone bell rang," she says. Instantly the lights go out.

In the stillness you hear a telephone bell ringing and before you have had time to say scat up flash the lights again, and you sit stupidly blinking at a completely furnished library wondering how in tarnation it ever got there, for the stage hands have made no noise, and scarcely sixty seconds have elapsed since the scene was that of a court room and the witness on the stand was saying: "The telephone bell rang."

The remainder of her testimony is enacted before your eyes. The same method is pursued throughout the three acts of the play, with its multitudinous scenes which appear noiselessly, as occasion demands, and quite as if magic had worked the trick.

And always you come back to the court room where the defendant quivers in acute suffering; where his little daughter offers reluctant but damning testimony, and where the young wife tells her agonized story. In three sessions of the trial, and at three vital moments in the unfolding of the story, the audience, as well as the jury, is carried back to see the testimony given presented in flesh and blood, by the folk whom it concerns. Although Mr. Rizenstein has employed the technique of the photo-drama no screens are used. The

"retroactive" moving-picture plot furnishes the novelty of this thrilling melodrama which comes to us at last at the New National Theater this week after its sensational run in New York.

The young playwright who riveted the interest of the play-going world through his first dramatic effort is still under 24, and is spending his spare time nowadays teaching embryo dramatists how to prepare stage material. Mr. Rizenstein heads a club of young folk who aspire to fame and royalties, with Mortimer Block associated with him in his work.

At the Candler Theater the Rizenstein melodrama was flawlessly acted by a cast, including Mary Ryan, Frederick Perry, Frederick Truesdell, Hans Roberts, little Constance Wolfe, and Constance Collier in the leading roles. Mr. Perry and Mr. Truesdell continue in the cast, but Marie Leonhard, a young English girl who is a graduate of the repertory company of Miss Horniman, in Manchester, England, follows Miss Ryan in the part of the wife; Jane Wheatley plays the role created by Constance Collier and Ethel Downie takes the place of Constance Wolfe in the impersonation of the child witness, giving a performance here as that which held thousands spellbound during the long run of the piece in New York.

In musical vein comes "The Princess Pat" to the Belasco this week with the most engaging prima donna of the hour in the title role. The operetta is the work of Victor Herbert and Henry Blossom, a combination which is security for plenty of neatly turned musical phrases on the one hand and an interesting libretto on the other. Whether ambitious, or otherwise, Mr. Herbert's music may always be depended upon for enticing melody with ripples and runs abounding. The seeker of entertainment possessing anything whatever of musical taste seldom fails to find satisfaction in a Herbert score. This should prove doubly a fact when that score is interpreted by a cast headed by Eleanor Painter.

Twice Miss Painter came to us in "The Lilac Domino," and twice she went away with all hearts conquered. Just as New York thought, she proved a genuine discovery. Her voice is clear, strong, sweet, and well produced. She has personality—oodles of it—temperament—more oodles—and histrionic ability of no mean dimension.

"The Princess Pat" had its premiere in Atlantic City early in September of the current season; was heard in Philadelphia, and taken by

John Cort to the Cort Theater, New York, where it enjoyed a substantial run before going on tour. Besides his contribution of the book to this operetta Mr. Blossom has done similar work for "Mlle. Modiste," "The Red Mill," "The Prima Donna" and "The Only Girl," in addition to his authorship of several comedies including "Checkers" and "The Yankee Consul."

At present he and Mr. Herbert are engaged upon a new operetta which is to serve as a vehicle for Miss Painter's stellar debut under Mr. Cort's management another year.

Who do you think was in our midst last week? No other than Madame Olga Petrova, late star of the justly deceased "Revolt."

While waiting the production of a new play by Louis N. Parker, which is to serve her as a starring vehicle and talents to films for the Metro folk, who made last week a portion of "The Soul Market" in the vicinity of Washington. Madame Petrova is a brilliantly intellectual woman, as well as a great artist needing a great play. Unless he is to depart from his pastoral poise and quiet in his new work one cannot conceive of Mr. Parker achieving a drama dominated by emotionalism commensurate with the ability possessed by this consummate artist who, since her coming to America, has been singularly unfortunate in plays, having been exploited in the pernicious "Panthea" prior to her appearance in "The Revolt."

But some day one acquainted with the real conflicts that go on in the human heart will write a play teaming with passion, and Madame Petrova will have found the opportunity that is the only needed thing to make the American theater-goer fully conscious of the supremacy of her intellectual and emotional power.

"If Shakespeare could rise in his grave and witness some of the events scheduled in his honor this year," Pauline Maurer declares, "it is reasonably certain that he would go back to his shroud and consider himself fortunate to be among the departed."



ELEANOR PAINTER  
IN  
"THE PRINCESS PAT"  
BELASCO.



FREDERICK PERRY AND  
MARIE LEONHARD IN  
"ON TRIAL" NATIONAL



A.H. VAN BUREN  
IN  
"OLD HEIDELBERG"  
POLI'S



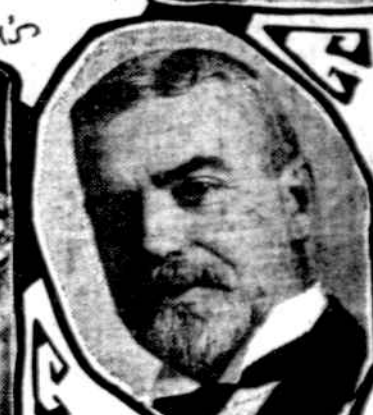
MRS. VERNON CASTLE  
IN PICTURES—CASINO—



JOE WEBER. KEITH'S



CLARENCE WHITEHILL  
AND  
MME. GADSKI  
NATIONAL FRIDAY



DWIGHT ELMENDORF  
NATIONAL  
FEB 24th

## Calendar of the Week.

National—"On Trial," the sensational melodrama, by Elmer L. Rizenstein, who employs the "retroactive" plot of the "movies," without the use of the screen, in achieving a distinct dramatic novelty.

Belasco—"The Princess Pat," operetta, with score by Victor Herbert and libretto by Henry Blossom, bringing us the most charming prima donna of the hour in Eleanor Painter, who twice won our hearts in "The Lilac Domino."

Poli's—"Old Heidelberg," a romantic comedy, in which A. H. Van Buren will be seen as the engaging young Prince Karl.

Keith's—Weber and Fields, surrounded by a promising vaudeville bill.

Gaiety—Burlesque.  
Cosmos—Vaudeville.  
Casino—Pictures.  
Loe's Columbia—Pictures.  
Garden—Pictures.  
Strand—Pictures.



SCENE FROM  
"THE CONQUEROR"  
—A STRAND—



MARY GRAY  
—COSMOS—



SCENE FROM  
"HE FELL IN LOVE  
WITH HIS WIFE"  
—COLUMBIA—

but by the unique manner in which its scenes were presented.

When the curtain rises on the first act, the audience sees a courtroom where a man is on trial for murder. The regular proceedings of the court are gone through with up to the time the first witness for the prosecution takes the stand. This witness is the wife of the murdered man and the moment she begins to speak the stage darkens, the scene changes to the home of the murdered man and all the testimony of the woman, which includes the murder itself, takes place before the audience.

The play is about the Princess Patrice di Montaldo, an Irish girl who has married an Italian nobleman and who is living on Long Island. She is called Pat, for short. The prince has grown careless in his display of affection since their marriage, and to teach him a much-needed lesson, as well as to save her friend, Grace Holbrook, from a union with Anthony Schmalz, a wealthy oil duffer, she enters into a scheme to arouse the jealousy of the prince and at the same time the suspicions of Grace by starting a harmless flirtation with Schmalz. In this she has the co-operation of Bob Darrow, a sort of adventurer chap, who plans to have Grace marry young Tony Schmale. This all works out nicely after threatened duels and other indoor sports.

Victor Herbert's score is said to be interspersed with pretty solos, duets, dances and concerted numbers, the title of some of these being "Allies," "Make Him Guess," "I'd Like to Be a Quilter, But I Find It Hard to Quit," "Love is Best of All," "For Better or for Worse," "Neapolitan Love Song," "All for You," "Flirting," "The Shoes of Husband Number One as Worn by Number Two" and "Two Laughing Irish Eyes." In addition to Miss Painter the cast will include Sam B. Hardy, Al Shean, Alexander Clark, Robert Ober, Joseph R. Lerova, Louis Casavant, Martin Hayden, Eva Fallon, Leonora Novasio, Ralph Riggs and Katharine Witches.

National—"On Trial."

"On Trial," which comes to the New National Theater tomorrow night, is an interesting melodrama from the pen of Elmer L. Rizenstein, which has been repeatedly praised for its originality. Prior to the production of this play at the Candler Theater, New York last season, Mr. Rizenstein was absolutely unknown. The morning after the premier his name was on every tongue and his first effort at play construction hailed as the most original piece of stagecraft presented in a decade.

"On Trial" made an instant appeal, not alone for the compelling power of its story and the big human note which throbs through all its acts.

Keith's—Vaudeville.  
Weber and Fields will be the leading attraction at Keith's this week. The famous burlesquers, who rejoice in the description of "assassins of the Kings' English," will be seen as "Mike and Meyer," their celebrated characters, and the episode which they will punctuate with their judicious language and actions will comprise excerpts from old favorites like "The Pool Game" and "The Statues," together with added material of recent vintage. There will be the Weberfelds eye-punching, throat-throttling, and other impromptu "brutalities" which the lanky Fields will feloniously attempt upon the person of the podgy little Weber.

The supporting bill will include Jose Heather, of the English music halls, assisted by William Casey and Bobbie Heather; Mr. and Mrs. Frederic Voelker accompanied by several associate players in Una Clayton's playlet, "Music Hath Charms"; Marshall Montgomery, assisted by Edna Courtney; Gertrude Long and Spencer Ward in a singing act; Bert Melrose, the clown; Burns and Lynn; the Gratzers; the organ recitals and the Pathe pictorial.

Today at Keith's the bill will present Mrs. Langtry and company, Julian Roe, Sam Halperin, Norton and Lee, "The Old Homestead," Double Quartet, Four Mayakos, Daniels and Conrad, Lucy Gillett, and others.

Gaiety—Burlesque.  
A double bill will be offered at the Gaiety this week, when "The Sporting Widows," by Jacobs and Jermou is to be seen, together with the official German war pictures "Germany at War," showing actual scenes taken on the battlefields, many with the aid of telescopic lenses.  
Ruth Lockwood is seconded by Abe Leavitt, who is to be seen in a number of new roles in "The Sporting Widows," which is a musical revue. Impersonations are introduced during the action by Abe Leavitt, John Barry, Anna Mack, Billy Evans, Ruth Lockwood, Babe Ames, Vincent Dusey and Helen Lockwood. Several specialty acts are also introduced. A chorus of girls of all types is carried, and every one of them is said to be a musician, displaying her individual talents on either a stringed or wind instrument. Today will find a diverting program at the Gaiety, all of last week's features having been retained and a number of new ones prepared. The entire cast of "The Social Maids," headed by the Dances.

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